



The Posit Trilogy

Adam Fieled

Argotist Ebooks

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The Posit Trilogy

I. Posit

Posit

I want
but that's
nothing new.

I posit
no boundary
between us.

I say you,
I know you,
I think so.

I know
what world
is worldly.

I know
how death
stays alive.

I never
enter third
person places.

I could
go on
forever.

Come to the Point

I am that I
that stations metaphor
 on a boat to
be carried across.
that makes little
 songs on banisters,
which are slipped down.
that slips down
 antique devices,
china cutlery & white.
I am coming to
 the point. I am
come to the point.
I am that I.

Day Song

& this reflexivity, right now: how it
bounds. how we are the sum total of our
limitations. we catch glimpses. what's in
the catching. what's beyond, behind,
between: purple fear. bodies randomly
chosen, for different reasons. dreams of
form. charades. too bad, but always the
knowledge, if we are lucky, of scattered
constellations in the world. chewable.
fragments. progress. only in patches.
must. do.

Illinois Sky

One could sink upwards into
it, lose brown earthy stains.
Conglomerated air-pockets,

tucked into figments, wide
enough to lend temporality
sense, day's square progress.

This I don't know about, this
feeling, expanse contracted,
sex impulse etherealized, I

can't see this w former eyes.
It is, after all, a doorstep,
just me entering me again—

cream purse, vulval sheen.

Lars Palm Dream

I was skulking in
a dorm room with
Lars Palm, who
was chucking
lobsters. A yellow

globule tried to
get our goat; a wall
started talking.
Lars was furious.
Some girls were

involved with us,
as junk piled up.
Lars threw a
lobster at the
yellow globule,

roaring. It was
a pivotal moment—
bare walls. Rubbish
heap. Fucked
globules. We left.

Eyeballs

They sent a maid
to clean Jocasta's

chamber, a stout
ex-maenad, still

full of wine. She
happened upon

the two eyeballs
of Oedipus, doused

with blood, beneath
Jocasta's dangling

feet. They were
smooth, tender

as grapes. She
pocketed them.

They became play-
things for her cats.

Perhaps there is
use for everything,

she thought, raising
a glass to her lips;

and if I am a thief,
who will accuse me?

Rowdy Dream

I was slumming @
Andrew Lundwall's.
There was a demented
cook called Seana
w/ tortured ringlets.

There was a cooking
issue, a food problem.
I ate something.
I stayed on the fifth
floor, away from

rowdies on floors
two & three. My
Mom broke in,
spoke of better
food, more rowdies.

I wanted to be
more rowdy, left
floor five. Seana
spoke gibberish to
me in the kitchen.

I wasn't happy or
unhappy; I was in
the middle. All this
time Andrew Lundwall
sat on a throne on

floor one. I was
making my way
down there when
I awoke— no food.
I became rowdy.

To Bill Allegrezza, after reading *In the Weaver's Valley*

"I" must climb up
from a whirlpool
swirling down,
but sans belief
in signification.

"I" must say I
w/out knowing
how or why
this can happen
in language.

"I" must believe
in my own
existence,
droplets stopping
my mouth—

alone, derelict,
"I" must come back,
again, again,
'til this emptiness
is known, & shown.

Waiting for Dawn Ananda at Dirty Frank's

in the syntax of

my vodka-tonic,

& in the neon

& smoke-rings

kisses hang

before breezes

Le Chat Noir

I pressed a frozen face
forward into an alley off
of Cedar St., herb blowing
bubbles (am I too high?) in

melting head I walked &
it was freezing & I walked
freezing into pitch (where's
the) blackness around a

cat leapt out & I almost
collapsed a black cat I
was panting & I almost
collapsed I swear from

the cold but look a cat
a black cat le chat noir oh no

Girl with a Cigarette, Modern Painters cover, January '07

You don't mean it, do you? You
don't know that the blue around
yr pupils is sky in a vice, that your
fingers are too complicated.

Nothing shows you that shadows
over yr neck do not account for
over-delicacy, that shoulders
simply squared reveal damaged

breast-matter. You smoke, not
knowing. You take a drag, too
picture-esque. Your pose is a
pose, your cheekbones simply ash.

10:15 Saturday Night

then like how bout we give this
thing a chance or at least not bury it
beneath a dense layer of this could
be anyone, we could be anyone,
anyone could be doing this, just
another routine, another way of
saying hello, & goodbye just

around the corner like a dull
dawn layered thick in creamy
clouds, ejaculations spent

Jessica Smith Dream

Jessica Smith was dead
on a bed on a screen in front
of me. She lay, obscure head
in darkness. I touched

the screen— it grew red.
I touched her head on the screen
& she was alive again,
& blonde. I retreated

from the screen, hearing her
breathing. I felt as if I'd just
performed an exorcism—
this was holy water. I shook

through the time it took.

Dracula's Bride

I married into blood &
broken necks,
endless
anemic privation, but

no regret. You see,
hunger fills me. I like
vampire hours (no

sleep), a blood-vessel
pay-check, diabolical
companionship, tag-team

seductions, guileless
maidens about to
be drunk.

We know what sweetness
is in starvation. We've
found, satiety

is death's approval stamp.
If you crave, there is
room left in you. If

you want, you are a
work-in-progress—
being finished is

a cadaver's province.
Better to suck
whatever comes.

II. Deposit

Deposit

To build
an I
is to see it

rust, stripped
down into
pluralities,

so that I
write against
my own

evanescence—
dissolutions which
don't allow

palimpsests—
trees sans
bark, molting

of interiors—
now, time
future can

only reverse
currents, enact
withdrawal of

the phallus from
fun, friction. To
build an I

is to decoy
it underground,
after fashions.

The Point, Made

Seeds left, softening, somnolence,
sleep in/beneath a patina of silt,
salt waves heave above— slow,
life lived in burrowing downwards—
de-centered into diaspora, a sense
(subtly, oil-slicked) of knowing how
self has/maintains few points of
coherence along the myriad veins of
interior time— interiors sans cohesion,
diabolical densities against coherence,
beneath vertical turtles bound to their shells—
dropped seeds crawl all the way down as they will.

Night Song

& what goes out, remains out.
diminution determines. expanses
opened by destruction. contractions
towards sight-birth. a going-off in all
directions. gloriously center-free.
aligned with arbitrary, arbitrations.
moments to air-puncture. aggressive
pursuit of time past.
to strip back as bark. roots just left
as roots in the ground. immobile
as pure objects, taking off subjects
ad infinitum.
the rhythm— no one cosmos listens. remains composed.

Manayunk Sky

Facades on Main Street have a lift
towards it, but the Manayunk sky
isn't there, a mirage, a conglomeration

of spent wishes for a better human future
which can never be lived in the blackened
glare of well-trodden pavement. Its

expanse argues loudly for the subaltern
and its accessibility, a superior up
is down, a superior blue is black,

a superior open is packed tight
into a closed linearity, night's deep
recess. Now, I take the trouble

to interrogate pavement, which
can only deny truths of not-surface, hotly.

To Augustine, after reading his "Confessions"

If you really did find
something or someone
immutable, freed from
torturous progress, I
can't say I don't believe—

If you came to rest
apart from the unworkable
aligned profoundly with
profundity's alignment,
congrats from a still point—

If I seem cynical,
catching your desperation
as tides confounded you,
I at least know your death,
its heft, text, all plumbed

by me, or someone else.

Waiting for Dawn Ananda at the Bean Café

To have to play a hand

(shall I ever get a hand in?)

poker gives you five fingers—

yet I catch in the South St. air

ten fingers or a spider's eight legs,

immobilized behind a dense space—

10:30 Saturday Night

You see it (the word) all over the old
stuff, "satiety," never think what it
means until you get it via her, the entire
package, and it still can't mean much
because she's a repository for bad
vibes, evil impulses, like ghosts of
old movies, and in her mind it's
always a scene for her to play,
especially now that the deed is
done, against the grain, not a sin

merely a circumstance, but heroism
which could be (telling the truth
now the truth's against me) is
subsumed by the anonymity of
sports bras not decoyed in darkness—

Decoy Dream

You were one of the twelve
of you doing what you were
doing; promised a part in
a Communist parade, a five
year contract to be who you
were against eleven imposters—
I saw you on South St. on
my thirty-sixth birthday,
you had pigtails, and as you
lied to the barrista about
working at Condom Kingdom
(for seven years), I remembered
Loren Hunt limp on the floor of
Gleaner's bathroom on mescaline—

Decoy Dream II

I was sitting outside Westminster
Arch smoking a butt in the February
chill, when you passed me (you can't

see in movies how your ears stick out,
how tall you are, or that the jet-black
mop on your head is cut short), stood

in the doorway with something wistful
in your posture, as if I'd killed you,
buried the chance that your endless

decoy vigil could end; in other words,
I was putting you down. In truth, I was.

Absinthe

Situations which, to see properly, you
might want to imagine a floating
sensation (as though you'd hit the ceiling)—

they've closed the Eris Temple on 52nd
and Cedar; if there were (as has been
suggested) corpses beneath the floor-

boards I didn't see them, nor did I notice
the imposed regime change five years ago
and, yes, I would've cared, but then I

re-register, this is Philly, heavy on inversions
and abasements, situations you can
& cannot float over, and the syrup poured

over your efforts takes back what it gives,
towards justice, balance, deathly intoxication—

Orpheus

Why maenads
torment Orpheus

is that his songs
need to be sung

to attentive audiences,
not little rapists—

he's always on
the run these days,

maenads hunt him
down, unwind his

parts, so that he's
too loose, a ball

of rubber, who
can't front, body

public, seed
so much in

the street that he's
more urchin

than artist,
they dice up his

babies, it's a never
ending cycle, yet

he keeps his
lyre in tune,

because (he thinks)
who knows, he's

learned not to look
back, and crooks

don't rattle him anymore—

To Courtney (Double Entendre)

yes, the family wanted me dead,
not you, but I killed you off nonetheless,
just as the Asians predicted
(Dragon born in a snow-storm),

& the picture remains filed
away, as do your years of
rowdiness, the child that you
were, & killed, leaving
“double entendre” in my

hands, driving my cart/plough
over dead bones, knowing

our marriage of heaven & hell—

Dracula

Few know: Augustine and I
had a life as twins,
we each dealt with

temporal successiveness,
he had his way, I mine—
I forever remain closer

to the immutable than he—
a clod of earth, weaned
on the richness of blood,

which makes me more
subterranean than you can
even see, a gliding,

velvet-suave underground,
confessing nothing,
finding “sin” fraudulent

in circumstance, a multi-tiered
universe as scabrous
at the top as at the bottom—

my rhetoric aims, still, at
Augustine, for he (also) is
immense, and has his

immensity against me
somewhere secret, private,
his dark Carpathians,

inaccessible to a mere clod,
a covetous one.

III. Re-Posit

Re-Posit

What becomes
of an I
posited

in a holocaust?
You are
against what is—

you linger
on what is
from inside

a cul-de-sac,
held up
only by yourself,

in rigors,
overwhelming,
past returns.

Now I,
immobilized,
saunter

as interiors
remake themselves,
scaffolding

put up
of whatever
solidity

inheres,
only in here.

The Point, Beyond

So much space inheres, so much
withdraws from what space opens,
light from blue-tinted suns & skies,
so that leaks of seed may only be
caught when one's back is squarely
turned, towards more maintenance. As
circuits express boundaries, what "I"
inheres has a sense of endless reign,
half-accepted, half-rebelled against, but
mobile seeds & selves past horizon, gone.
Crosses drop— barbed wire ambience,
seeds of fathomless lows, brilliant clarities.

Midnight Song

& thus, moonlight on leaves. visions
contract. breath decoys possibility, but
midnight witches. to grasp for the moon.
receptivity stretches its limits. droplets of
blood: farce/face. shelled creatures lurch
from bodies of water. portents position
themselves. sheathed in blue again, as
intermittent presence. what clear facades
against the darkness— pane beyond
pain. bricks arrayed, cut by lines— all
progress just arrangements of cloud.
firmaments un-reflected.

Main Line Sky

Clouds conglomerate against notions of
isolation, dispersal into atoms; sovereign
against human contingencies, which neglect

the arbitrary's ultimate importance in composing
form and then function; streaks of sun, floating
segments, as morning dissipates potentialities

in and out of glass doors, opaque to how
all might coalesce past the imposition of
will. Our distinctions, exposed in this fashion,

are tenuous, gambits sans grace; moods
made jagged as we are watched & never alone
from processes pulsing above/beneath us,

so much funneled into sky's antithesis.

To Joseph Conrad, after reading "Heart of Darkness"

If the spirit of universal
genius is meant to float
down the river into naught,
to be attenuated by the
jealous against authenticity,

& if it turns quotidian life into an
unworkable mess, as universal
genius attempts to forge
alliances above spheres which
must be minded on Earth,

& if it expresses itself to the crass,
the crass is everyone,
& Kurtz understands
the parasitism involved,
saturation in/by malevolence,

then I'm down the river, up
forever—

Waiting for Dawn Ananda @ Volo Coffeehouse

As you may never show as
you once shown, they have
a likeness of you serving coffee,
who bares her navel against
your sovereign grande dame
status, but she's contrived as
this \$8 sandwich I can't afford—

Tranny Dream

I find myself in bed with a woman
with a man's crotch, & find this
unacceptable, & so excuse myself
into an autumn evening in North
Philadelphia, looking for a train
station, finding more nudie bars.
I get trapped in an enclosed space
with a stripper, done with her work
for the night, who counsels me
against taking the train home, that
I can sleep with her backstage at
her bar. I push past, into the night
again, & am assailed on all sides.

Midnight Saturday Night

You said (it was a way of saying),
pray you touch my parts in such a
way that you don't damage them, but
of course I can't touch your parts
except to damage them when the times
are so forbidding that to have parts
not backed by gold is to have no parts
at all, & it can't be crisp as it was,
fresh as it was, ripe as it was, as
your cauldron is full of grease, against

holding on to anything but allergies,
& I am allergic to the idea of doing this
if a new cauldron cannot be forged, &
you're (& I'm) a fox walking on ice in a
blasted landscape, & at midnight we
crash into this together—

Murder Dream

There was a concert somewhere, I was there with a college friend who wound up betraying me, & I murdered the son of a bitch with a shot-gun; they told me I could get off scot-free if it was only one murder, & as I sat in the balcony trying not to notice a show of cadavers onstage I angled my behaviors so as not to offend them.

Next shot: I saw the dead man's life pass in sequence before me, & he was bound by a five-year contract to die shortly anyway, which is probably why they let me off, even as cadavers played invisible instruments in arid air—

Eris Temple

That night I got raped by a brunette
chanteuse, I lay on the linoleum floor
of the front room sans blanket, & thought

I could hack it among the raw subalterns
of the Eris Temple, who could never
include me in their ranks, owing to my

posh education; outside, on Cedar Street,
October gave a last breath of heat before
the homeless had to hit rock bottom again,

& as Natalie lay next to me I calculated
my chances of surviving at the dive bar
directly across from the Temple for

the length of a Jack & Coke, North Philly
concrete mixed into it like so many notes—

Orpheus II

If Orpheus is
forced to sing

in abject solitude,
nothing changes—

his lyre retains
its form/function,

vocal notes sound
identical proportions—

the song leaves
into distant lands

& reaches,
echoes among
strangers

he'd like to love, but
for now he only

hears his own
echoes, & haunts

his own dreams
of an Over-World,

inverse-plutonian
around authentic

intensities, & clarities
searched for are found,

as though they're there—

Dracula on Literature

You can't tell me
you don't feed on
the mysterious disappearance

of the need to do this—
that raw life & blood
would suffice to

satisfy, & gird you
against the grinding
towards sphere-music

you fancy you make.
I've lived a thousand
years among human

souls, all in need of
blood, little else, and
words are no blood

at all— what suffices
for such as you is
(as you say) a

simulacrum of blood,
with limited flow-
potential, & as such

I counsel you (if
you ask) to feed on
something more wholesome—

don't scoff— wholesome
is not relative
for the human species,

& your words are dirt,
feeding no one directly,
& those who feed are

suspect, chilled by
exposure to terminal
frosts, unable to bite

what might suffice in the end...

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fourW (Anthology)— “Manayunk Sky”

Nth Position— “Day Song”

Otoliths— “Dracula on Literature,” “The Point, Beyond,” “To Augustine,” “Tranny Dream” Skicka— “Andrew Lundwall Dream,” “Lars Palm Dream”

Stoning the Devil— “Eyeballs”

wood s lot— “To Augustine”

The first portion of The Posit Trilogy, Posit, was released as a Dusie chap in 2007.

About the Author

Adam Fieled is a poet based in Philadelphia. His books include *Posit* (Dusie Press, 2007), *Beams* (Blazevox, 2007), *Opera Bufo* (Otoliths, 2007), *When You Bit...* (Otoliths, 2008), *Apparition Poems* (Blazevox, 2010), *Mother Earth* (Argotist Ebooks, 2011), *Cheltenham* (Blazevox, 2012), and *Cheltenham Elegies/Keats' Oda Cycle* (Gyan Books, 2015). A magna cum laude graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he also holds an MFA from New England College and an MA from Temple University.



The Great Recession

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The Great Recession

Inelegant

Her mind, she tells herself, is a Center City mind. It's connected (somehow) to the whole world. She still goes into Joan Shepp on Walnut, even if she can't buy anything. The fabrics, the cuts of the dresses— this is who she is. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she knows she's been cut like a piece of fabric; & the hands that cut her have made her inelegant. To handle Joan Shepp silk with dishrag hands, is to have waded into the deep sogginess of the 'burbs, & emerged like jell-o.

Abington Night

I keep imagining Abington at night.
The sense in the air is this: we can't
be as far down as we are. The guy
tending bar here (in this dreamed-
of place) is an old friend. His angle
on the world (he's been married and
divorced) is satire. But satire depends
on people being willing to laugh. And
if I still sit in my car in the parking
lot of Abington High leering
at girls, I can still laugh at that too.
The Dairy Queen on Limekiln Pike
remains the same. The girls still like
ice-cream in the summer-time, right?

Fellating the Pickle

Everyone knows she has about two years to live. The blonde babe who runs shipments sits smoking at the Esquire Bar with a guy who still has the rat-tails he had at Cheltenham. How do you behave when you have two years to live? Well, you might try making your body a weapon. You might bop around shaking your hips so that no one might touch. Or fellating the pickle which comes with your sandwich. You might. But as you dance on nothingness, someone watching you is also watching his watch.

Greeks

“They pulled a gun on him at the diner down the street. He was halfway through his burger. The Greeks who own the place didn’t care. They got bought off a long time ago. I eat there for free sometimes. He probably eats there for free too. They don’t play sides, that family. So if you want a place that’s your place (as we used to have), you better have more money than the other guys, which we don’t anymore. And it’ll take you a year to nail this guy too.”

Sports-talk

This guy sticks to sports because the team makes a sport of kicking his ass, he said. It's not like I didn't believe— but he only sticks to sports (I thought) in the end because the rules are right there in his head. And the guy who lives out of his car and has the radio set to "Sports-talk" all the time deserves to be shot. So: there was more than one game we were watching that night. This guy came in twice. But if he won't play by league rules, he's out.

Church Road Pt.1

Her big thing these days is cars. She loves to watch the bling ones (Mercedes, BMWs) as she sits in the passenger seat. It always happens, at least once a day on Church Road, that she sees one she wants so much she has to pinch herself to stop the ache. In any case, her Mom tries to be forbearing, but they always wind up fighting. Money is just too tight, and it's running out. But she's good at getting encouraging comments on Facebook. And if she occasionally gets one from someone with the right car, her night is made. Yes, if he asks, he may pick her up at eight.

Church Road Pt. 2 (Krispy Kremes)

This man runs a high-level corporation,
sidles down the street in a leisure suit,
I greet him and he greets me, does that
make me superior? Am I jealous? I ask
you this because I'm questioning things
I've never questioned before. You go
through life, go through certain motions
(never question things), then one day
find yourself belly-up, and wonder what
your life amounts to. I still drive
the Mercedes, & as I glide down Church
Road the response is a platitude. I stop
for gas in Northeast Philly, Krispy Kremes— hip, right?

Walls and Ears

A period like this, he writes on his blog, can make one question one's relationship with language. There's only one word for "bankrupt." "Insolvency," he supposes, works, but it's not drastic enough. What is drastic enough is this— popcorn dinners in this squat in Northern Delaware, nobody watching, "I can't think therefore I am not," and a sinking sensation of how the Academy's ego shuts out all light. He was a professor, he says, to no one in particular, with a teaching edge.

Fetching

Scabs, sores, pus— that's all she can think about, as she walks around in circles. But (of course) that's just my perspective. I gave her what I could (what she needs is money). So, two bodies are cramped in a crowded movie theater, watching a foreign film about the lives of terrorists. They're both tuned out, but have been told the film is excellent by several reliable sources, who consider them unimpeachable dogs— loyal, anxious, fetching.

Freezers

He walks around in a bilious, towering rage—he can't even stand the teenager selling him cigarettes. Nor can he stand the stacks of newspapers, the freezers full of soda, the rows of gum and mints. Everything here was made in a factory, as was he, only to find in the last epoch of his life he was alone, the shelf he was on bare but for him. The teenager behind the counter laughs at this old grump, because his father is even worse, who can't afford smokes.

Rolling and Falling

He keeps up the pretense— we're rolling here.
Any press would have to be good press, just
because it's us. It's funny how, on rainy nights,
he feels a sense of degradation about the life
he leads; that there's nowhere to fall, but he
keeps jumping. He has dreams where he falls
forever. You can roll and fall at the same time,
a voice tells him. He hears voices which tell
him many things. Especially in the middle of
the night, when scum glistens on the walls of the squat.

Peanut Butter and Rabies

The white-haired woman with glasses, doing charity work, wants some charity herself. The nights at this place have been long— the kids get disgruntled, people aren't bringing in as much food as they used to. If it's another peanut butter and jelly night, she has to bear the brunt. All the kids see is a half-empty plate. Her husband won't come anymore— the atmosphere is too strained. The kids, she thinks in spite of herself, are like a bunch of dogs with rabies. And, as she can't see, they think the same of her.

Shit-Face

Or maybe you'd like to condescend to inform us of your whereabouts the night she got mugged? Where were you? If you could only see how raising a child alone out here can break you down, corrupt you, leave you with nothing, you wouldn't have taken the money and disappeared. We have enough money left for a year and then we hit the road in the old car, looking for you. She'll be done school by then and if she can find a job when we settle, hallelujah. If not, lawyer up, shit-face. You're ours.

Wine and Spirits Shop

I look out through the glass façade—
a parking lot, cars, the whole suburban
patina. It gives me the flu in my old
age: these people, almost all of them,
have more money than me. And less
to show for it (I see) inside. I've seen
them live and die for twenty years here.
It never gets any easier. But look at me:
I work at a wine and spirits shop on this
strip-mall, so I can keep my thoughts
in any order I want, no one's going to notice.
I notice. I count to me. I count myself.
I can count. That's a twenty and a one, sir.

Sports-Bar Crowd

Let's stay on the surface, please.
Let's make our lives as compact
and lemon-shaped as a football. As I
sit among the sports-bar crowd, I
feel compact and lemon-shaped. I
am, in fact, being squeezed into someone's
beer. The whole pulpy story he's telling—
the hook-up never happened. I know
it for a fact. I've got (as ever) the goods
myself, I just doesn't use them. That's the
big treat for me— not using them. Busting
hooks-up. Getting drunk and not fucking.

Chinese Water Torture

Chinese water torture: that's how it is today with these girls, these schools, the IRS, everyone. He thinks this on his bike, as he swerves through the city streets. Last year he got hit: broke his shoulder. He was still insured then. Now, he's forced to just risk it. Two of the other messengers he "grew up" with are now deceased. He scattered one of their ashes into the Delaware on Christmas night. Then, he had his turkey. Cold.

Under the Knife

A razor was placed on a table outside— someone handed it in. From that moment forward, everyone at this Starbucks (the staff) were considered “under the knife.” They were all young enough to be my kids, and they all got hit before we could make any arrests. I still get my coffee there every day— the replacements are (as usual) the same kids all over again. The point (for me) is that this is a far uglier world than most people believe it to be. The older you get, the harder it is to take.

The Last Decoy

“After the last decoy, there is no other.”

This is what he wants inscribed on his head-stone; then he remembers; with the life he’s led, there won’t be a head-stone.

He stands like an ass outside the Kimmel Center, avoiding the rain beneath

The concrete awning, made up to look twenty years younger than he is. It’s a random assignment, handed down from a random place— but one (he assumes) above him.

Broad Street glitters in slickness as the day wanes and streetlights switch on. He’ll be out here a long time in the rain.

Anchor Man

Every day it's the same routine—
a few of these, a few puffs on this
or that. He reads from the prompter,
high as a kite. Everything he reads is,
as he knows, pure nonsense and even
high, he can't get comfortable with the
situation. It's all too obvious— not
that anyone's out there to notice. The
perks of local fame aren't much anymore.
But they drop the pills and the pot into
his lap to arrange the emptiness and
deadness of things. He seems to see,
receding into a greasy gray sunset,
some notion of an ideal he once had,
at least sometimes. The smile freezes on.

American X

From inside the American art scene, he used to think to himself (especially New York), you can only take things so far if you're not backed up; and (praise the Lord) he was. But he only did the requisite amount of dealing, and no more. He actually cared, here and there, about what he was creating. He was mordant and morbid the post-modern way, the art-press said. But the "X" someone scrawled on a napkin and left on his night-stand last night suggest something mordant to his will. Isn't that funny?

Romance

She was standing, in the dream, at
the end of a landing strip which emptied
into an open field of grass in pitch-black
night; her baby-doll dress was pitch-black
too; and, as I approached her, I saw her
dyed-black hair was cut into a fringe over
her forehead. I told her who she was for
me and she told me the same; and some light,
maybe the moon, shone down on us.
Was there life left to bring into the world?
Was that our light against the pitch blackness?
For better or worse, it would have to be.
Our arms were entwined.

Philadelphia Macabre

I saw it on the news— one of the ashen-looking tenements at 22nd and Market collapsed last night. It even made national headlines. As far as I'm concerned, everyone I've ever loved was in that tenement, every dream I ever dreamt was squashed in the falling concrete, any future I might've had was dust before the entire edifice had fallen— now it's a hole in the ground, a hole in the street, a hole in our heads. Now I'm squashed myself into a suburb, choked by claustrophobia, remembering walking that block late at night, stoned, everything concealed as a cut I couldn't notice.

Mouth Breathers

They keep you running in circles, these hacks, and what they want to express (as artists) is the nothingness of everything—particularly, who we think we are. When they see your games, what they Zen master is your sense that you exist. But they don't do it with any intelligence; they can't do detail, complexity, nuance. As I'm chained to decoying against these mouth-breathers, I feel that gnawing sense of nothingness and don't know what to do with it, except to say something. My own mouth-breathing superiors can't bust me for doing so. Or, that's what I dare to hope.

Do It With Teeth

The Internet guy from the United States is one she likes. Her and her friends sit in Hyde Park diddling with their smart-phones, and she always picks him to linger on. He has a blog about international politics, & one about culture. He's a Harvard guy, too. The twist in the tale, for her, is that he's actually decent to look at. She plucks the banjo to his Google image search. But she's a right ugly slag, and who she's got isn't much. If he discovered what she was up to, he'd beat her senseless, then hop a plane to Boston to top him. Her secret is, she likes Americans better. At least when they lie, they do it with teeth.

Ideals

The guys in the Harvard administration buildings have had enough. Where's the old good guy system, folks? Despite our Ivy League pedigree, the system used to be simple: you scratch my back, etc. Not all of us have touch-the-ceiling IQs. We represent Harvard where it counts— where the money is. You want genius beyond that, screw you, buddy. The problem is that tax-guys, parents, everyone's starting to ask more questions. Even the guys who get cuts want more information. What we're under orders not to reveal never changes much. Now they want us to live up to our "ideals." Ideals?

Space

On his daily walk down Fayette Street, he senses something he's never sensed before— space. With everyone cleared out (into death, probably), he owns the ground he treads on, and the space he takes up is his own. That's his compensation, as an older man, for the misery and deprivations of the Great Recession— space. He feels the cosmos, how vast it is, and as he stands in a short line at CVS to pick up his prescriptions, the cosmos has in it something eternal, which will continue with or without him, or us. Emptiness is what you make it.

She Drives a Ford

She sees no reason not to flaunt what she's got. The way her mind plays around with the idea of dying is that it doesn't. She just assumes that if she is going to die this summer, obsessing about it won't help. She's more obsessed with the new pills they've been throwing at her. As for her dude, forget it. He doesn't have much left. When she pulls into the Whitemarsh Shopping Center, the sunlight still feels fresh on her face. She can still afford a macchiato. It's true, everyone notices: she still looks good. And the full tank in her Ford is her ass backed.

A Dog's Life

They're letting him write something which he knows can't be published. They're also watching him (literally) as he writes. When the family you come from is not a family but a FAMILY, he writes, and then loses heart. The quarantine's gone on for three weeks. They feed him pot and pills, but no girls. They've mastered his eyes, which he thought might be tricky for them. His eyes (he sees) are a dog's eyes, which yearn to be put down, and to sleep. He's never got used to thinking differently, but if he can't write he might as well be dead. He writes, and waits for someone to shoot him.

Lightning Storm

He has his car parked where they can't see him. Though the angle is strange, he can see the two kids, about thirteen, a boy and a girl, in the dug-out holding hands. He's here for a reason other than them. But something about the vista of the two kids in the dug-out brings tears to his eyes. I'm human, he thinks to himself, I'm a human being. Do I belong to the human race? It's begun to thunder and lightning—the three of them are all trapped (he thinks) differently. For once, he likes something past himself.

Mini-Mart

What happens in the Mini-Mart stays in the Mini-Mart. When they get the call from the guys at Weis, one shift takes over for another, & everything which needs to move moves. They have once-a-week regular customers who want in on the action. This summer its really starting to swing. The problem is that the cops have figured out the whole game. Off-duty cops fill up their tanks here just to watch these amateurs. The D.A. guys are watching the cops watch; and, for the moment, everyone's happy. The head manager used to be a professional, knows the whole game too, but he's just here for the paycheck.

Ridge Pike

To someone stationed in the parking lot of the Whitmarsh Shopping Center, it's shocking how light the traffic is on Ridge Pike on a Saturday morning. He's got his coffee and the radio's on. It's crisp and sharp— soon to be a hot day. But he was depending on seeing three of what he'll now only see one of. His mind wanders— this place didn't look that different twenty years ago. His routines haven't changed. If things go faster now, it's just because he's older. And there's not a cloud in the sky.

Morning Train

Pacing outside the Conshohocken Station on a summer morning, having spent \$10.50 on a round-trip ticket to Market East as she's been forced to do twice a week, she gets nervous about having to shit or piss on the train (she's got coffee), and if she shits her panties they will very much notice, but nothing can be done— a gig is a gig. The photo shoots make her wonder who's left to jerk off to her feisty little parts, what fourteen-year-old intercepts the catalogues in the mail to lock himself in the bathroom. Turns out, she boards the train and does have to shit. Welcome to half an hour in Hades. Thanks, Mom.

Yellow Cab Company

His own language has no words for some of these things Americans talk about. He doesn't bother to talk to his passengers anymore. Nor does he e-mail his family back home. He only thinks how to up the ante at playing the video games he likes. The games allow him to express how he feels— here's who he shoots, here's who he spares. He connects to others with the game, too. His supervisor thinks of him as mid-level; not one of the best or worst. He eats modestly and sensibly. One day, he might be able to afford bigger speakers, and a real bed, if he scrounges.

Crumpet with Teeth

Someone actually bothered to ask him this: why does the media like fake people better? The answer, as he knows, is simple: because they're easier to control. In truth, he said nothing in reply, just left. He was trying to pick her up: crumpet, they call it in England. Since when is there crumpet with teeth? He browses the mags where he is: the piss-on-mes, the shit-on-mes. He does feel shit on. Conquest has never been easy for him (though he's often been called "striking"), and now his position is a disreputable one. He'll take the black-with-big-tits one, please.

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As/Is— “Space”

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Otoliths— “American X,” “Anchor Man,” “Wet Dream,” “Limekiln Pike,” “Abington Night”

Red Room— “The Last Decoy”

About the Author



Mother Earth

Adam Fieled

Argotist Ebooks

* Cover image by Susan Wallack

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* *One Part Paradise* © Susan Wallack

Mother Earth

#1

Yes, this is how it must be, high up;
there is no earth in this pitted wood.
Stoli, Captain Morgan's, especially;
all taste clear, brackish, bring sweets.
Beneath flesh, digested meats;
she's expecting, wants me to die.
If I'm dead, I drink to this death.
If I live, I curse her stomach, too.
There is little else to do. New York:
a crust of bread that crumbles, spits.
When I take her, I take an island:
all streets split to flush us into it.
There's a steep price for this shit.
Our low-down: reverse mountains flake.

#2

Listen, now that I've got you alone I need to break a few things to you. You think this guy is going to make a responsible father? Look how shiny these shoes are, and you know why? I took the time to have them shined. This guy has hands that shake, eyes that dart, lips that curl, and it's all because he can't take care of himself. You think having two kids at once is going to be glamorous? Do you really have that much of a martyr complex? Please, here's another Diet Coke, I know this isn't fun for you, especially because you have to cab it back to the subway. I'll pay.

#3

Look: the boy-child sleeps. Of course, he left
a cigarette in the ash-tray; sudden death's here.
I take his sleeping hands, place them on my
belly, just so he knows, at least somewhere in
the dense green fog of his existence, what's about
to happen. My breasts are watermelons, it's sick.
His hands are limp. I'm damp: I still want this man
(if he can be called a man, if that bald pate signifies).
To think, that all he's swallowed in this are lies.
Of course, tiny streaks of spit mar his pillow.
I bought them of course, and their blueness works.
He'll leave me lit too, and wanting a real father.
Yet, do I take the blame for this hideousness? Yes.
Two babes are sleeping while I get undressed.

#4

Truth is, he's only half-asleep. He left
the cigarette in the ashtray, hoping the
place would burn down: he's a terrorist.
She's the fattest woman he's ever kissed.
But, as she lies her hefty bones beside him,
there is tenderness that wells up softly.
If he opens his eyes, he falls deeply, again.
Outside, slush builds up, brown, grey.
The blue Hudson signals from beyond.
Nighttime is not a time to go someplace.
It's a common human race scenario;
with a pregnant wife, you do not go.
Now, she snores, he flips the spit-stained
pillows, laid stiff like a cadaver, ashamed.

#5

Do their dreams coalesce? His dreams are still, blue:
girls in their youths, pliant limbs, bright eyes, smooth.
In dreams like this he doesn't have to move, they do it.
Long languorous lays on beaches, he digs deep for it.
There is no risk as the spray hits him, here to eternity.
But crosses dangle mysteriously from blank blue skies—
each one slightly different to the others, asks repentance.
So he pumps as her face changes (this one, that one),
confesses to it as he finishes, reaches for a drink, it ends.

It's 4 a.m.: if there is a wolf at this hour, it's him.
In the dim light, her frame repulses him swiftly.
His mind explodes with exploded possibilities,
all the how things used to be that never were.
That spit on the pillow should've been for her.

#6

Poor guy that he is, he sits on the toilet, not needing to shit. He thinks if he pushes his bowels hard enough (especially with all the Heineken in him) something'll come. Truth is, he just likes the idea of flushing parts of himself. The shit comes from within, so that's less of him exists. Yanking up his boxers, he looks in the wall-length mirror. A wraith, more or less emaciated, looks back. No one to watch over him but many, many to subjugate, withhold, deny, supplant, stymie, titillate, vex, disturb, outfox. His eyes are his best feature: stark raving mad sapphire. They glow in the dark, an old girlfriend used to say, they dazzle. He sits on the toilet with the seat up, enjoying being pointless (not just pointless but profoundly pointless, that's the thing, a beacon of pointlessness, a pointed husk.)

#7

He figures he might as well smoke outside.
My lady, he speaks, doth need no smoke.
But it's cold and he thinks, who cares?
Each drag mixes with the final beer buzz
in a sweet, maudlin, *I'm doing this* haze.
Yes, the father smokes, drinks, reveals
the good Irish taste not to hide these things.
Succulent, how hazy his mind is in miasma.
The calendar on the kitchen wall has some
tart on it, stretching her parts like rubber bands.
Maybe she's the one from his dream? She may
as well have been. He's a father, he's past this
stuff. Still, the old hangman's itch hits him at
such an angle that it's back to the bathroom.

#8

His erection juts, but fades as he vigorously pumps. Feeling knavish, he runs to the kitchen, takes the calendar off the wall and, in his drunken sense, it seems perfect to rub the picture on his crotch. As he does, he stands, and the baby's tears and his intense drunkenness and his lover's fat ass and the tart's large breasts move him so much that when he finally finishes it is with such emotion that he barely notices a few words coming from the bedroom. He finishes, makes a wad of toilet paper to sponge off himself, the sink (he used soap this time), the formica counter, bits of puddle on the floor, all doused with such reckless extravagance that he gets proud all over again (she's saying something about coming here, now).

#9

Erection just beginning to subside, he glides
like an ice skater into the bedroom, sheepish.
He had seen from the bathroom's light all
the angles and creases of her careworn face.
What bothered him was facing her breath.
At this hour, the wrinkles make it like death.
Please, God, one or the other, not both.
His stealth has won him nothing, as he kneels.
He rests his elbows on the navy blue sheets.
There it is: the reek, combined with the ways
she tries to combat it: Crest, Listerine, floss.
He is still seeing the calendar girl's sleekness.
There is richness in having both, until he sees
that there is really only one he has, and wants.

#10

He's getting hard again, and wants to take her, just for the hell of it. But she moans about his errant ways, and she even knows what he's done with the calendar that remains doused near the bathroom sink, laid sideways. He is someone who crawls, but he's being babied here. She looks at him and sees so much to love, from distances. But this right up close angle makes him ten pounds richer with white and black and red and blue scum. She's a bitch, she knows that but this man carries on (she can't believe he's sitting here kneeling as if in a pew, will he just please get in bed?) as if the world was pure shoots and ladders. She splits her mind into before him and after, and now realizes it's just her breath, so makes a slight shift back. Still, he won't climb in, though he knows she wants it.

#11

He intertwines his fingers behind his head, not having listened.
Since he doesn't drive, there has to be a set up for water breakage.
He thinks of waves breaking on beaches under tropical moons.
He wants to sip pina coladas, or just to dive in the Hudson.
That time when he was five, his Dad took him on a boat into
Lake Michigan, there was big blueness all around, he saw spirits.
He told his Dad and his Mom and his brother but no one believed
him. Plus, all those songs about water, waves, tides, thunderstorms;
what if he were to be washed up into a cyclone in the Hudson?
What if all this were just a dream, and his crying penis was neither
crying nor a penis but just some puppet from Sesame Street let
loose into his life to make mischief among big birds, elephants?
Not that he wasn't completely looking forward to all these
challenges; just that now that he's thwarted, he can't sleep.

#12

I need a chauffer, please, to help me through this.
Every time I enter one of these trains, I see one of
these spic hustlers sticking a needle into my guts.
Look, it's the fat pregnant lady, everyone, far too
old to be doing this, but doing it anyway. Hours
of typing, hours and hours, just for these lawyers.
It's always briefs that sound more official than
me and my child. Husband is too strong a word.
Me and the girls go down to the Midtown Deli,
and in my head I say, I'll have a Heineken, please.
Oh, the slush and sleaze of it, Midtown in a buzz.
Ten years ago this was a playground, with slides.
Now I'm too concerned with my fermented insides.
Yes, I'll call for a limo tomorrow, with a wet bar.

#13

Could I have finished the degree I started as a kid?
Clump of dorms, all these guys proving themselves;
I used to love to use the line about being their friend.
To watch snow fall from a heated dorm room, as your
roommate cowers beneath a pleated comforter while
you fool around with a newfangled theater ace: apogee.
The taste of him beneath me, exercise of perfected
strengths, lip muscles, special tender dips, tongue-arts:
then the sudden rush, the presto sense of having done
it again, his mouth open, glaze-eyed look, half-hidden
by this narrow space unlighted, transgression felt every
which way: I've never been happier or more free.
I was a swallower of all kinds of swords, including his.
Then, I'd kick them out, cause I still slept, dopey me.

#14

I had nice thoughts about some of these guys. Joey, the theater ace, wrote plays, and he babbled to me about Ionesco, how what he wrote would be the next logical step forward, into a kind of abyss, and that I could help him achieve this, just in sucks. He'd read the monologues sometimes to us in different rooms and there really were gorgeous passages, and I made him promise to keep in touch. For a few months he was working in the Lower East Side and there was some interest. Now he works in real estate, and says that money seems more permanent than art. Hank was the resident guitar genius, of course I not only blew him but slept with him, and he wrote me country rock songs in the manner of the Eagles. His studded belt now catches third graders, mortgage bills.

#15

I need a limo to take me to the grocery store: that would be especially glamorous. Groupie in the back seat, long cascades of blonde hair with ringlets at the front, midriff shirt, hands pressed down my pants, mouth slightly ajar from booze and painkiller combos, so that I'd be fiddled with in the few minutes before I'd have to enter Shop-Rite for orange juice, pickles, chicken tenders, spaghetti, red sauce, milk, all because my real bitch, she of the fat ass, thunder thighs, sudden whims, might have a midnight hankering for Neapolitan, as I myself now have more or less three streaks: shit brown, eyeball white, strawberry red, so I still change stripes.

#16

O, deadbeat me; snug as a bug in a rug, stoned.
I might eat this Neapolitan all myself, so soft, so
creamy, so like the life I deserve but do not have.
How be mad? She both has the kids (we're sure to
have a bunch, I've got this unbridled potency, she's
short enough we can do it standing up, maybe in the
bathroom at Manny's, as they roll out the Al Green
covers on karaoke night), works, am I a jerk to be
basking in the privileges of almost father hood?
At least I'm still— what's the word— continent, at
least I can wait to jerk off until she's not around.
We should have parties here with the Manny's girls.
It would liven up these awful wood-floored rooms.
It always feels like the first time with Manny's girls.

#17

He picks up the shitty guitar, puts his hand where G chord is supposed to be, begins to strum. He wants to sing Wonderful Tonight to put him in a romantic mood for her return but stumbles going from D to C. So he just thrashes away on G, improvises words about ex-girlfriends and this one, who (let's face it) might as well be. He changes tempo every few bars to make things interesting, makes it to D, and voila, he's a rock star once again. Backstage, he fends off the usual radio/record company folk, tells his guitar tech where he wants his guitars kept from now on, gets the road manager to round up his girls for a private session in the cramped but impeccably catered dressing room (pigs in blankets, cold cut spreads, apple fritters), plays food games with the girls, but (oops!) this really is the guy from the big magazine, time for an interview, see you later, girls.

#18

She gets home to find him asleep, a tableaux: mouth slightly ajar, glasses laid on the night table, still in his Yankees cap, to hide the shaming baldness he found repels the Manny's girls— they of the pinkish lips, truly tight asses, who hang around Staten Island as though Manhattan were a distant dream; lays of Italian dudes in leisure suits in backs of dusty Japanese cars. This, her sort-of husband, is the kind of kid she never would've taken seriously when she had her looks, when her black bangs melded with her face's perfect oval to sear her image onto so many groins she thinks she can still see the plaintive glances. Ice cream, she thinks, she needs ice cream, dissolutions in sugar and cream to give her the rightful death of this.

#19

As she spoons the stuff into her mouth, wishing *he* tasted like this, she remembers that musical she was in, in high school: *Fiddler on the Roof*. It's that song Tevya sings that tweaks her: "If I were a Rich Man." *That's right, Tevya, you and the rest of the world*. She thinks to herself, Tevya at least got to be the star of the musical, I got caught in the chorus. To think of having to get in those cut-cloth get-ups to be in all these scenes, just to lurk in the fucking chorus: I should've quit when the cast list went up. "Cast list" intoxicates her brain with possibilities, a sense that maybe there will be more cast lists somehow in the future: she could start doing theater, maybe finally break through with something creative. Moms sometimes still do creative things. She builds him into the He-Man he isn't; that he can and must be responsible, a mensch behind the wheel, a stud in bed, safe as milk for the kids, even chucking their diapers.

#20

There was the lunch reverie about college and then this dinner reverie about high school: I feel like a crab, going backwards. How can I move forward again? In the end, I know it's me and the kid alone. It said in the paper today they have a new bill that requires everyone to receive Health Insurance. Does that mean I can kick his sorry ass out, and not worry that he'll wind up with a needle in his arm in Tompkins Square Park? Am I beholden to him forever for a few good shots? Here, she pauses to cry, thinking of him prowling the East Village, as he was when she picked him up for the first time. He was so innocent and so charming, throwing in little quotes from all these love sonnets his girls wrote for him. She had convinced herself that stability was latent in him. The baby-like white of his bare torso depressed her, even if it heralded (she had decided) a noble, creative existence.

#21

The thing about Manny's, he thinks, is that it's a tiny bar with a tiny mentality but no one here quite realizes it: the girls in halter-tops do their hair-flips, the Italian guys insist on different key points about the Giants, but the girls in halter-tops can't do anything in the world but hook-up with these leisure suit guys. That, of course, is where I come in, cause it's "fun night," so that she sips a Diet Coke, my eyes prowl around, there's one with black hair and a solid faked tan as if she's spent time in a kiln. He scoots over, leaving his very pregnant mistress, and enjoys the sensation of moving between discrete worlds, as though he's a globe-trotting superstar, too big for entanglements to limit his feeling of himself as a Zen arrow.

#22

He wasn't expecting to feel a sense of degradation as he sat down next to her, her baked skin exuding perfume. It's the scent of another world, of sex that happens that might as well be shopping: scent of malls, mall vanities. It is arousing, he's aroused; her black hair flips in huge danger waves towards his crotch. I'm intrepid, he thinks, this is pioneering work, and since I can't write poems anymore, it's all justified: she wants me to be creative again, as if giving her a baby isn't enough. He sets down his beer, subjects this girl to one of his long, caressing stares, adjusts his Yankees cap to make his eyes visible. She pouts and, miraculously, is not surrounded by a group of raven-haired hair-flippers. "Can I buy you another drink?" She half-nods, looks vaguely towards him, down.

#23

She's doing a crosswords puzzle while he does this, which, he knows, means he's being humored, a willful kid at an arcade, who forces his Mommy to wait. He notices this girl's pink sweatpants and zip-up sweatshirt with a hood, and decides that football is a safe topic. She agrees, and the conversation begins and does many strange somersaults as they both realize what the situation is, that she can make an interception here. He's got the hangman's erection yet, but there remains an insurmountable problem; wifey's got the car keys. If there is to be a hook-up, it has to happen here. Luckily, it's not that cold and he has half a joint in his wallet. They take a hike into fresh air to get stoned. Once out there, they look at the stars, he thinks of arrows going through space, and then he is, for real (for once) up against her, seriously, and likes the feeling.

#24

Sandra, she says her name is, tipping her blackened head onto his chest, wracked as it is by coughs. He introduces himself as Ronnie, who lives on the island with his big sister. She happens to be pregnant and is humoring him here at Manny's. Heads leaned close, she tells him she's got a boy friend, but they happen to be fighting, she's out on her own (an errant lamb, in his mind). Exquisite tensions force his hands to smooth down her back, anchors sinking to plant themselves someplace solid. Sandra doesn't want to kneel, touch, kiss; just this little grab in autumn's wasted chill is enough.

Ronnie is nearing the end of his rope. As he lays in bed with Jess, he aches to hold Sandra ever so much closer. Would conceiving another child (as Jess's remains unborn) be against any laws? Jess, of course, not only knows what Ronnie thinks (she had snuck behind the dumpster to monitor his progress, Diet Coke still in hand, as though watching a particularly juicy brawl in which her big male antagonist was getting throttled), she knows there will be Sandra, then another, then another, but until the man learns to earn his own living he will come home to roost with her. There: a vicious thought he deserves. All she vetoes is an exchange with sperm.

#26

Jess's ascension; she rises, both quick and dead, over this many times (and many ways) bespattered bed, into a scene of youth; utopic suburbs, bikes with bells, how trees looked in May with not much school left. Succession of images; diasporas of life, miniaturized, in many directions. She liked church, then; thrills of new words, "benediction," "annunciation," "absolution," and in her streams upwards she responds to a whim that God is more preoccupied with minutiae than many think. God in candy hearts, suck-rings, bags of midnight-snuck potato chips, and she hears what God thinks of this (perverse humor of an imp?), hears herself hearing (thirty years later) and passes swift, merciful judgment on all things unborn, liminal, or born. Pregnant women, she has heard, are plugged into the universe; a cascade of white/blue lights descends. Jess flies, over putrid stagnant Hudson, absence of twin towers, corrugated Chrysler building, and this is deep, permanent, blessed with air and fire scars.

#27

Then appeared the angel: not delicate and feline, but raw, rough, determined. She presents familiar scenes to Jess, demands answers. Jess is in a weatherless place, sparked with stars. She starts thus: I know the lies that ride high and roughshod over my existence. That I have looked at many surfaces while motives remained hidden, and believed them; that I have willfully lied to create, maintain, and retrospectively preserve appearances; that I have contrived to fix things not meant to be fixed in eternal patterns; all this I know. But this is all held within the confines of a dream; I will wake up unawares, carrying a circular burden, determined to efface (without being conscious) these lessons. I want to know how these things may be carried across; why I am subjected to the torment of deep truth and abasement. Here, the scene changes; another panorama; Jess tosses within a sense of flailing over Fifth Ave., vacated and loosed from concrete forms. Now she is wrapped, uncomfortably swaddled; now she jerks up in bed to hear Ronnie's snores, comfortably folded back into short wheezes. What's next?

#28

When I woke the next morning, something had changed. I looked at Ronnie, as he dragged his sorry ass out of bed; sunken-in chest, bald head, baseball cap worn (out of vanity) even to breakfast, slumped shoulders that express raw needs, cast out onto me like damp nets; and I realized I could see a path of purity, running out like a lane at a tangent to this. The problem is the mercy I cast out onto others. I'm a fish, born St. Patrick's Day; my parts flake off. I've always encouraged others to pick flakes off of my body. I'm middle-aged; my spirit isn't robust. So I have a fish-maze to work through, that I might expunge this minutely voracious predator, and bear a child, to/for myself. The cost, for Ronnie, is not less than everything: he will be sent spinning like a plastic top in search of a sick-bed. He will again be at the mercy of parents who force black veils over his mouth, crotch. It will have been me to spin the threads of the veil. Meanwhile, the eggs are fried, the bacon ready, orange juice, coffee.

#29

Here's how Jess does penance: she doesn't just kick him out on his ass (in her mind), she throws his belongings into the Hudson, and him along with them. She's moving, she thinks, not only towards parturition but towards departure (from this, from him, into a sacred two-person space, mother and child). But look: he's there on the couch, watching the late cartoons, rolling another bomber she (inadvertently) purchased. She digs down deep for a spine, and there's something there (is there something there?) No more flights backwards: the situation has achieved maximum density. "Hey look, all the little guys in this are fluorescent," he says. "Isn't it a little early to be lighting up?" He clears his throat, ignores her question; laughs at cartoon antics. Outside, a car screeches to a halt. There is some kind of argument, neither is interested enough to look. Twin diffidence relaxes into obliviousness. But Jess has felt an inkling of something, holds onto it. You can't take a vision away from a dreamer, she thinks, but there are (she knows) options still available to her. The first is to cut off his allowance, so that the first tang of Hudson might sully his lips. She begins to prepare a speech.

#30

Ladies and gentlemen, you are here today to witness the reverse of a benediction. This boy, this man-child at best, has willingly fertilized my body. If I curse him, it is with the caveat enjoined that my will has been (and remains) compromised. But the curse must be planted, a bad seed with good consequences, and it is three-fold: against his body, a scrawny, pale, hairless contrivance, which festers in every conceivable vice, funded (in my frailty) by me; his soul, lost in dreams of easy fame, self-expressed in facile, mediocre verse; and his mind, balanced like slow-to-melt snow on brittle branches, worn down by too many dry seasons. I hailed this convocation of angels because I am building, building. The crescendo must be this man's expulsion, orchestrated to resolve in a minor key for him, major key for me. At this, Jess's head snaps up, and she realizes she's been dreaming. Yet the dreams are closing in. Ronnie's asleep too; it's five o'clock in the afternoon. The newscaster says, "in other news today, temperatures are down all over Manhattan. The weather is coming up next when we return to News at Five." For once, Jess sneaks a bit off of Ronnie's spliff. Nothing left to do but work. And it's a long sleepless slog to the next rest stop along the winding way.

#31

She just did it. I woke up and she said, “Look outside the apartment door. You got a package.” It was all my belongings— a trunk and two big leather bags. “The guitar’s mine,” she said, though I begged. So here I am on a bus to take a plane, to take a car, back to cheese-land. I can’t even get high; I have to work to stay awake. I know that when I look back on this, I’ll say “All those Staten Island nights. That’s when I had it made the most. I had it all.” What am I supposed to say? I can’t face a life of work, I have a hobo’s soul, I’m meant to drift through aimless days.

He boards a flight to Chicago, his Mom will be there at Midway to meet him. She’ll be in clod-hoppers, glasses, inquiring after his health, unaware that a grandchild is on the way. That’s me, she thinks, always oblivious because I need to be. Ronnie sleeps on the plane, having snuck a valium in his sneaker. Somehow (he wasn’t expecting) it missed detection. Somehow he also managed to miss detection. He’ll have a kid, his cheese-land friends won’t know. Between children and poems, he will leave a legacy to the world. Thoughts he leans on amid the lightning-storm turbulence, unsteady as random shots.

#32

The gossip goes round: Jess kicked her house-boy out. He's back to the farm. Who will wait for Jess's water to break? Who assembles the crib? The office and the old crowd are abuzz, as Jess knows. So what? She has two or three friends in her back pocket that have lasted, will last. She's too old to fly blind, even if she's forced to hover near the ground (as she is). You should've seen us at Manny's, she tells them. All the baked-skin beauties went for my little man-child. Yet there is an edge of regret in her voice, for what age does to a human heart. Degradations never end— she has never weighed more, and the spics (she thinks) on the train (God help her if her water breaks) laugh at her jerky movements, appalled lurches. But I've got my back up, she thinks, because I passed this test: to get rid of the pest (who is, her friends note with half-smiles, the father of her child). Oddly, Jess often feels like a little girl; her mind bounces around, just like the child within her (who could be either: no ultrasound). She sees the future through her child's eyes. There are joys, panics, outbursts, setbacks, but all impelled by a clear sense of forward motion. The chorus of her song falls a full step back, and juts a step up again.

#33

It's a girl. Jess names her Marissa; she is given Jess's last name. Her friends get her to and from the hospital. When she returns with Marissa, the apartment (a studio with a bedroom for the child) is stripped of all Ronnie's traces— calendars, pictures of bands, shots of stars. Jess accepts the fate of a single mother— every night sleepless, every day harried. At least the office allows a substantial maternity leave. Sometimes, as the child naps, Jess watches the sun set over unlovely Staten Island and finds it beautiful as Paris. It isn't just that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, she thinks; it's something buried that can be dug up. One thing Jess likes to dig up are her old journals, especially the teenage ones. She always comes back to the same entry: the day she lost her virginity. April 7, 1987: O my God, I did it! That's it, that's the whole entry. She feels the same way right now. Memories drift back: she was big into Peter Gabriel in those days; she was playing in the chorus of "Pajama Game"; the boy that did the deed was (of course) one of the leads. It all happened because he got stuck needing a ride after rehearsal. She was the driver, as she is now. Virginity is a state of mind. Jess feels twenty-three years of filth have been effaced.

#34

Post-script: visions of Staten Island through a child's eyes. Row after row of duplexes; apartment complexes (different color bricks, red, white, brown), places for food, clothes, everything she needs. There is only one deep fulcrum of activity: Mommy. She, also a kind of brick with changes, revealing different things: moments of calm, of strife, of bursts into silliness, a wheel spinning. When Jess pushes the carriage around (a mall, say), the brown, baked girls thank their lucky stars they don't have kids. Yet, they suppress jealousy: something there so rested, composed, steady. Down at Manny's, Ronnie's flame works on new guys. Ronnie reclines on a Wisconsin farm, where he works, unaware that Marissa, when she plays, soon finds out what a "Daddy" is. On the nights when Jess can sleep, she sees wide vistas, open spaces, but with a sense that the angels hold her back. There is work unfinished; somewhere on the horizon, something looms. Awake, she knows as Marissa grows, as her body changes, aches will come that cannot be assuaged. All the questions she has found answers to will be asked again; all the old contrivances will be explored, from new angles. Marissa's blue eyes stick; auburn hair. What sticks is mystery.

Credits

Mipoesias/Miporadio— #s 2/3

Pirene's Fountain— #12

Turntable/Bluelight— #s 24/26